

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

We write to raise concerns about the lack of sunscreen in personal protective equipment (PPE) for servicemembers and, based on troubling reports we have received from those directly affected, request answers to questions regarding shortfalls in existing policies. As members of the military sacrifice daily to protect our country, we have a responsibility to equip them with basic protection that safeguards their health during their service to our nation.

The most common cancer in the United States is skin cancer, with at least one in five Americans developing it during their lifetime. Skin cancer, including the deadliest form, melanoma, is a unique and major threat to our military community who carry out their missions in environments of extreme solar radiation. Decades of studies going back to WWII confirm the linkage of exposure to the development of deadly melanoma.¹ Shockingly, one of the most proven skin cancer prevention tools, sunscreen, is not included in PPE for military personnel. We have also learned that there are cases where servicemembers were prevented from using their own sunscreen during training and deployment.

Both the U.S. Surgeon General and the World Health Organization have publicly recognized the growing impact of skin cancer and the role of sunscreen as important prevention tool. Having five or more sunburns doubles the risk of melanoma.² A recent study using data from 1999 to 2018 showed that the likelihood of skin cancer diagnoses was higher in U.S. veterans than in nonveterans; which undoubtedly causes an increase of utilization and cost to the VA health care system.³ In the near term, readiness is diminished as servicemembers seek and undergo biopsies, recover from procedures, and receive treatment for advanced disease.

¹ Kelsie Riemenschneider, Jesse Liu & Jennifer G. Powers, Skin Cancer in the Military: A Systematic Review of Melanoma and Nonmelanoma Skin Cancer Incidence, Prevention, and Screening Among Active Duty and Veteran Personnel, 78 J. Am. Acad. Dermatol. 1185 (2018).

² Skin Cancer Foundation, Skin Cancer Facts & Statistics (Melanoma Section), <https://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts/#melanoma>.

³ Rezaei SJ, Kim J, Onyeka S, et al. Skin Cancer and Other Dermatologic Conditions Among US Veterans. JAMA Dermatol. 2024;160(10):1107-1111.

According to a Uniformed Services University report, “melanoma is the most significant cancer to affect the active-duty military population.”⁴ A 2014 study published in *Military Medicine* found that the melanoma incidence rate among servicemembers was 62 percent higher than in the general population between 2000 and 2007.⁵ Additionally, aircrew were found to have an 87 percent higher rate of melanoma than the civilian population, while groundcrew had a nine percent higher rate of melanoma.⁶

Recent studies have reinforced these findings and demonstrated that ultraviolet exposure during military service can have lifelong effects. A study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* found that veterans have an 18 percent higher risk of stage III and a 13 percent higher risk of stage IV melanoma at initial diagnosis, indicating that when veterans are diagnosed with melanoma it is at a more advanced and dangerous stage.⁷ It is unconscionable that the men and women who serve our nation face an elevated risk of developing a deadlier form of cancer as a direct result of their service. Given the seriousness of this issue, we respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. What efforts is the Department currently undertaking to encourage sunscreen use among servicemembers?
2. Are there any Department regulations that prohibit servicemembers from receiving sunscreen in care packages from family or using their own sunscreen during training and deployment?
3. Are commanding officers authorized to dispense sunscreen?

Cancer should not be a direct product of military service. Upwards of 90 percent of skin cancers, including melanoma, are considered preventable through the use of sun-safe behaviors such as daily sunscreen use.⁸ This low-cost, widely available prevention tool could save lives, reduce disease burden, and greatly decrease future health care spending in the VA system if provided to our servicemembers when they need it the most.

⁴ Uniformed Services University, *Improving Detection of Melanoma in Military Populations* (Feb. 2018). <https://news.usuhs.edu/2018/02/improving-detection-of-melanoma-in.html>

⁵ Lea, C. Suzanne, et al. “Melanoma Incidence Rates in Active Duty Military Personnel Compared with a Population-Based Registry in the United States, 2000–2007.” *Military Medicine*, vol. 179, no. 3, Mar. 2014, pp. 247–253, <https://doi.org/10.7205/milmed-d-13-00356>.

⁶ Paul. Winnington. “US Military Veterans at High Risk for Melanoma - Dermatology Education Foundation.” *Dermatology Education Foundation*, 14 Nov. 2025, dermnppa.org/us-military-veterans-at-high-risk-for-melanoma/.

⁷ Chang, Michael S., et al. “Increased Relative Proportions of Advanced Melanoma among Veterans: A Comparative Analysis with the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Registry.” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, vol. 87, no. 1, July 2022, pp. 72–79, [www.jaad.org/article/S0190-9622\(22\)00392-9/abstract](https://www.jaad.org/article/S0190-9622(22)00392-9/abstract), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2022.02.063>.

⁸ The Skin Cancer Foundation, *Skin Cancer Facts & Statistics*, Feb. 2024, www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts/.

We urge you to immediately prioritize the inclusion of sunscreen in all PPE kits and look forward to receiving your response to our questions by July 23. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

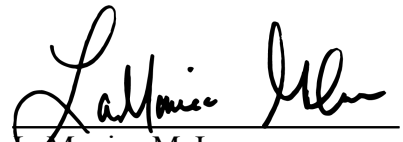
Sincerely,



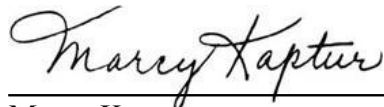
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



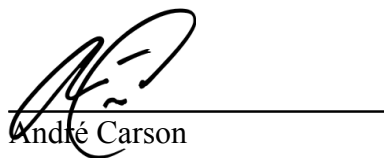
LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



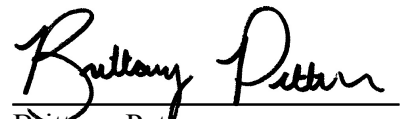
Marcy Kaptur
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Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress



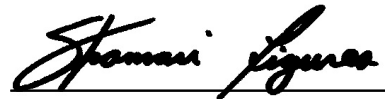
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Deborah K. Ross
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Shomari Figures
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Adenta S. Grijalva
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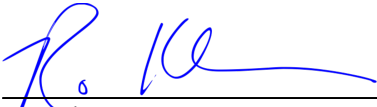
Jasmine Crockett
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Ro Khanna
Member of Congress